

You Ought To Be In Pictures

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Summary: The gang finds out that being the subject of a holofilm isn't all it's cracked up to be...

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"You Ought To Be In Pictures"

Standard Disclaimer/Credit Where Credit Is Due: The Star Wars characters belong to George Lucas. The other characters belong to me. Any resemblance between my characters and real people is entirely coincidental (OK stop laughing).

Lounging in his chair, the senator looked up at his Queen with a smug expression.

"I will be Chancellor," he said arrogantly.

"That never happened!" the Chancellor protested loudly.

"Cut!" Famed director Lucas George yanked his headphones off his head, threw them on his chair, and angrily rounded on Palpatine. "What do you think you're doing? You have to be quiet when we're shooting! Holofilm stock isn't free, you know." George's angry glower sent his production crew scurrying, but Palpatine stood his ground.

"I never said that," he said. "At least not in that manner."

"Well, you're saying it in my holofilm. It adds to the drama." Palpatine's eyes widened in amazement.

"Do you mean to say that the total blockade of Naboo, the illegal invasion of our planet, and the interment of thousands of the Naboo in camps where they starved to death isn't dramatic enough?"

"Ahâ€| well, see, it's like this," the director explained. "I've decided to focus on other aspects of that incident. Concentration camps and starvation are real bummers. We want this to be a feel-good holo." Palpatine gave him an astonished look.

"Thousands of my people died!" Palpatine reminded him. "I find it difficult to feel good about that!"

"My point exactly," Lucas said soothingly. "No one would feel good about thousands of deaths. That's why we're not even going to show the camps in the movie."

"You're not even going to show them??" Palpatine was incredulous.

"Don't worry, we'll at least try to mention them. Maybe. We don't want to upset our audience, Chancellor." Lucas reminded him. "This is going to be a HAPPY movie. All the really bad stuff has to take place off-screen." Suddenly, PadmÃ© was at Palpatine's side.

"Your Majesty," Lucas said, giving her a slight bow. "It's a pleasure to see you." PadmÃ© drew herself up to her full height and coldly met Lucas's eye.

"You will not be so pleased when you hear what I have to say, Mr. George," she told him coldly.

"Ooo, that's great," the director said. "Hang on a minute, I've gotta write that down." PadmÃ©'s eyes widened in surprise at being treated so casually.

"It is not too late for me to withdraw my approval for this holo, Mr. George," she said imperiously. "Take care to remember that." She stalked to the back of the soundstage where SabÃ© stood. Palpatine followed, but was stopped by a hand on his arm. He turned.

"Yes?" he asked irritably. Palpatine's patience with Ira McDonald, the actor who was portraying him in the holofilm, had quickly been exhausted soon after their initial meeting. Ira brandished his script at Palpatine.

"This scene," the actor said, pointing. "When you're testifying before the Senate."

"What about it?"

"It says here that you're to have a slight smirk on your face. I was wondering â€" " Palpatine cut off what was sure to be a long, complicated question.

"There are holos of the special session in the Senate Library. I suggest you go there and ask to view them. Tell the librarians that you have my permission."

"But â€" " Ignoring him, Palpatine joined PadmÃ© and SabÃ© at the back of the soundstage.

"That manâ€|" he muttered under his breath. PadmÃ© laughed.

"Was he telling you all about his theatre again?" she asked.

"No, worse."

"It's amazing how much he looks like you, though," SabÃ© said. The three Naboo watched as Ira engaged Lucas in a discussion that the director obviously didn't want to be having.

"His hair looks funny," PadmÃ© commented. SabÃ© squinted at the actor.

"I think it's a wig," she said.

"Wuss!" Anakin yelled. He lowered his lightsaber and advanced threateningly on his opponent. "You fight like a girl! No, wait, that's an insult to girls everywhere. You fight like a baby! A big, fat, spoiled BABY!" Actors Leo Nelson glared at the Jedi and brandished his weapon with a flourish. Anakin laughed. "Good job, moron. You just cut your left ear off."

"What?" the actor asked, his hand flying to his head.

"Good thing we're not using real 'sabers." Anakin tossed his prop on the ground, glanced back at Leo and snorted. "Ass."

"Now, Anakin," Obi-Wan said. "Were you any better when I trained you?" Anakin shrugged.

"Probably not. But I wasn't an arrogant actor who thinks he's a hot shit swordsman just because some prop guy showed him how to hold a sword when he played Roy Rob."

"This is all bullshit, you know," said a new voice behind them. Obi-Wan rolled his eyes.

"Not this prat," he mumbled. Evan McGuinness, dressed in his Jedi robes, sauntered across the soundstage where the two Jedi were training the actors in the basics of swordplay.

"Everyone else is in this for the money, but not me. I'm a SERIOUS ACTOR. My art is more important to me than material bullshit." Evan continued.

"Yeah, yeahâ€| we know ALL about it," Anakin said.

"My uncle was in all of the original Force Wars holos," the actor continued, undeterred.

"We know," Obi-Wan, Anakin, and Nelson said in unison. A small blond child wandered onto the soundstage. When he spotted Anakin, his face lit up.

"Anakin!" actor Jack Floyd yelled. "I'm gonna be a Jedi just like you when I grow up! See? I even have my own lightsaber." He held up a lightsaber from the prop department. "See? I'm gonna fight wars just like you!" Anakin smiled.

"Believe me, the life of a Jedi is not as exciting as you think." Anakin headed off the soundstage. Oblivious to Anakin's words, the child waved the lightsaber excitedly as he followed the

Jedi.

"Anakin, can I see YOUR lightsaber? Your real one I mean."

"No."

"Can I touch your Padawan braid?"

"No."

"Can we prank call Queen Amidala on her cell voicephone again?"

"No."

"Can we send Lady SabÃ© more fake e mails from the Chancellor?"

"No."

"Can we put another 'Honk If You Think I'm Gay' bumper sticker on Obi-Wan's hovercar?"

"No."

"Can we go up on the catwalks and drop water balloons on the Chancellor again?"

"No."

"Awwwwwâ€| Annnakiiiiinnnâ€| he whined. "You're no fun."

"If I never see another actor again, it will be too soon," Obi-Wan said as he sat down at the table with PadmÃ©. Shooting had paused for a while as the sets were readjusted, so they had gone to the studio commissary for some food.

"Rough, huh?" she asked, popping a fry into her mouth.

"You have no idea. Between The Expert Swordsman and The Serious Actor, Anakin and I are ready to tear our hair out."

"I'd much rather tear THEIR hair out," Anakin said, setting a tray on the table and seating himself next to PadmÃ©. Jack Floyd sat down next to him.

"Hi Queen Amidala," Jack said. She smiled.

"Hello, Jack."

"I'm going to be a Jedi when I grow up, and I'm going to marry a Queen!"

"Or you could be a Jedi AND a Queen like Obi-Wan," Anakin muttered just loud enough for Obi-Wan to hear. He gave Anakin a dirty look. Palpatine joined them, setting his tray down with an angry clatter of silverware.

"Nice to see you, too," Anakin said to him. He glared at

Anakin.

"What's wrong, Chancellor?" PadmÃ© asked amiably.

"Nothing," he said shortly. He began eating without looking up. Anakin looked around the cafeteria.

"Ohhh," he said, suddenly comprehending. Across the room, SabÃ© and Ira McDonald shared a table. They were looking at a script, their heads bent close together. SabÃ© laughed at something Ira said to her, then moved closer to him under the pretense of turning the script page. He brushed her hair off her shoulder and whispered something in her ear, something that made her giggle and duck her head, blushing. Anakin turned back to Palpatine.

"Welllllllllllll, looks like there's a new rooster in the henhouse," he said, a huge grin on his face.

"Oh be quiet," Palpatine said irritably.

"My goodness, you're not JEALOUS, are you Chancellor?" PadmÃ© asked him teasingly. He didn't respond.

"Do you mind if I sit here with you?" They looked up to see Natasha Fortman holding a tray full of food.

"Not at all," PadmÃ© said warmly. "Sit next to me."

"Thank you, Your Majesty," she said, sitting. She looked around the table. "So, are you enjoying your visit to the set?" she asked the group in general.

"No I am not," Palpatine replied, standing. "I do apologize. I'm afraid I don't feel much like eating."

"Of course, Chancellor," PadmÃ© replied. She gave him a knowing smile. "I hope you feel better soon."

"Thank you, Your Majesty." In order to leave the cafeteria he had to walk right past the table occupied by SabÃ© and her new friend, which he did without giving any indication that they even existed.

"Boy is he pissed," Anakin said.

"Is he always that disagreeable?" Natasha asked. Anakin smirked.

"Only when it looks like someone else might get something he says he doesn't want," he told her cryptically. PadmÃ© laughed.

"What a load of bullocks!" Evan McGuinness said as he put his tray on the table and sat down next to Natasha. She sighed.

"What is it this time, Evan?"

"Yeah, did they decide to raise your salary or something?" Anakin smirked.

"No. They're cutting the fight scene down. They say it's because Leo can't fight for shit."

"You're kidding!" Obi-Wan said. "The Master Swordsman can't fight?" Anakin laughed. "I blame YOU for that, Anakin," Obi-Wan continued.

"Me?? It's not MY fault. I can't teach someone who already knows everything â€“ or at least THINKS he does."

"So what do these cuts involve?" Obi-Wan asked. Evan thought for a minute.

"Qui-Gon is going to be killed almost immediately. Then I'll kill the Sith, but it will be almost by accident. He's just going to stand there stupidly while I cut him in half."

"But that's not how it happened!" Obi-Wan protested. Evan shrugged.

"Welcome to the exciting world of filmmaking."

"Lucas is pretty mad at that Chancellor of yours," Natasha told Padmâ©. "He's getting even with him for those constant interruptions by making his character the bad guy."

"What?" Padmâ© exclaimed. Natasha nodded.

"Yep, he's going to be a Sith Lord. Not only that, but he's going to turn Anakin into one, too."

"This is intolerable," Padmâ© said

"I agree," Obi-Wan said.

"Me too! I'm sure as hell not going to become a Sith," Anakin said. Padmâ© stood.

"Well, I'll just go see Mr. George and tell him I've decided to withdraw my approval of this project unless some major changes are made," Natasha shook her head.

"It's not that easy. I overheard Lucas talking to his lawyers. You only had approval on the first draft of the script. He's allowed to make any changes he wants, and you can't do a thing about it." Padmâ©'s eyes narrowed.

"We will see," she said coldly.

"Hey, that's really good," Natasha said to Padmâ©. "Mind if I use it?"

"Sorry, I'm not changing anything," Lucas George said. He leaned back in his chair and regarded the four very irate people who stood before him. "I'll tell you what," he said, reaching into his desk drawer. "I'll give you a cut of the merchandising. How does that sound?"

"Merchandising?" Padmâ© asked.

"Yeah," Lucas handed her a miniature replica of herself. She frowned at it.

"You made me into a toy?" she asked. Lucas smiled.

"I made you ALL into toys!" He handed out a miniature Anakin, a miniature Obi-Wan and a miniature Palpatine.

"This doesn't look like me," Obi-Wan complained, holding up the toy for their inspection. "Look at him! He looks like a girly little twit." Anakin snorted, while PadmÃ© and Palpatine exchanged a glance.

"Sounds like they got you just right, Obi-Wan. Let me see yours," Anakin said to PadmÃ©, taking it. "Do their clothes come off?" Irritated, she took the toy out of his hand.

"You've gotten my nose wrong," Palpatine complained.

"Yeah," Anakin agreed. He took the toy from Palpatine and held it up to next to the Chancellor's face. "See? His nose is a LOT bigger in real life."

"Give me that," Palpatine said, snatching it out of Anakin's hand.

"So, you don't like the toys, either," Lucas sighed. "I've never met a more difficult group to please. First the script, and now the toys."

"We are real people, Mr. George. We're not characters you made up," PadmÃ© reminded him. "You can't just change the details of our lives to make your movie more exciting."

"Boy you ARE new to this, aren't you?" Lucas said condescendingly. "I suppose you believe all bioholos are true, don't you? Well, they're not. They change things all the time to make the holo more interesting."

"I think our story is quite interesting enough," Palpatine told him.

"Yeah, how often does a nine year old child save an entire planet?" Obi-Wan asked.

"How often does a fourteen year old Queen manage to retake her Palace assisted by only a handful of half-trained men?" Palpatine asked.

"How often does a Padawan manage to win a duel with a Sith Lord?" PadmÃ© asked.

"How often does an unknown Senator from some little backwater planet that no one's ever even heard of get elected Supreme Chancellor?" Anakin asked. Lucas George shook his head.

"Those things just aren't exciting. You have to have deception. You have to have intrigue. And you have to have unlikely plot twists. You have to keep the audience guessing at all times."

"Even if that means that the characters must behave illogically and erratically?" PadmÃ© asked. Lucas beamed happily.

"Exactly!"

"OK, everyone is clear on the plan, right?" PadmÃ© asked as they stood in the hallway outside the dressing room doors.

"Yep," Anakin said. He gave her a kiss. "May the Force be with you." She laughed.

"And with you as well." She knocked on Natasha Fortman's dressing room door.

"Come in," the actress called. PadmÃ© smiled at her co-conspirators and slipped inside.

Ira McDonald's door was open, but Anakin tapped on it politely anyway. From inside the dressing room, they heard a female giggle. Palpatine's eyes narrowed. The actor came to the door.

"Yes?" Ira asked.

"I DO hope we're not interrupting anything," Palpatine said in an insincere, overly friendly manner.

"Oh not at all! I've just been telling SabÃ© about my theatre. She's quite lovely, don't you think?"

"Quite." Palpatine agreed acidly.

"I've been thinking of offering her a role in our upcoming production of Jabba and His Amazing Technicolor Sarlacc, but I don't know if she can sing."

"Her vocal range is quite impressive," Palpatine said dryly.

"You would know," Anakin said under his breath.

"Oh, you've heard her sing?" Ira asked.

"Not exactly," Palpatine replied.

"Listen," Obi-Wan said when he finally felt he could speak without laughing, "we're going to Liam's Lounge for a few quick drinks. Want to come?" Ira smiled.

"Certainly. Let me get my coat."

"Oh," Anakin said suddenly. "Don't tell SabÃ©."

"Why not?" he asked. Anakin thought fast.

"It's gonna be just us guysâ€‘ uhâ€‘ a guys' night out." Anakin told him. Shrugging, the actor disappeared into his dressing room.

"I'll go get the other two," Obi-Wan said. Anakin nodded. Obi-Wan went up the hall and knocked on Evan's door.

"I'm not sure I can bear spending an evening with that pompous twit," Palpatine told Anakin, indicating Ira.

"That's OK, you won't have to." Anakin replied. "You're staying with SabÃ©."

"I am? What for?"

"You're going to make her forget alllllll about that 'pompous twit' and his rinky dink little theatre."

"Really? How?" Anakin grinned.

"You're a resourceful man, Chancellor. I'm sure you'll think of something."

"So," PadmÃ© said to Natasha, "you don't drink, you don't go to clubs, you don't hang out, you don't have a boyfriend, and you spend all your spare time studying." Natasha smiled.

"That's right. I go to Coruscant University, you know." PadmÃ© nodded.

"Ivy League. Very impressive. You must be very smart."

"I work very hard," Natasha said modestly.

"I'm sure you do. I'm just wondering if it's all worth it. I mean, you're only young once you know. What if when you're 35, you look back at this time and wish you'd taken the time to enjoy yourself a little more?"

"You think I should quit school? Or acting?"

"No, no," PadmÃ© said quickly. "I just think you might want to consider cutting back a little, you know? Don't accept every project you get offered. Then you'd have more time to make friends at university, maybe even hang out with them."

"I'm committed to this holo for the next six months," Natasha said slowly. "It really takes a bite out of my free time, I can tell you. I sometimes wish I hadn't accepted it."

"See?" PadmÃ© said. "You need more time to enjoy your life."

"I think you're right, Your Majesty," Natasha said thoughtfully.

The two Jedi and the three actors sat at a back table at Liam's Lounge. Two empty pitchers and one half-filled with Guinness sat on the table before them.

"That's not even the worst part," Evan said. "Not only is Lucas cutting his screen time down to under five minutes, but he's dubbing in someone else's voice." Anakin shook his head.

"And we all know why the fight scenes were cut down," Obi-Wan said, giving Leo a meaningful look.

"So," Evan continued, "Now he's going to quit and Lucas doesn't know what to do. Lucas reminded him that he'd signed a contract, but the guy just laughed and told him to do something physically impossible involving the contract, a lightsaber, a Wookie, and a tube of industrial lubricant."

"Phew," Obi-Wan said, letting his imagination run wild.

"I wonder if he realizes how easily he can be replaced," Ira said.

"Hey Ira," Anakin said suddenly. "Are you married? Got any kids?"

"Noâ€| I've been too involved with my theatre for that sort of thing. I always figured I'd get around to it eventually." Obi-Wan and Anakin exchanged a look.

"How old are you?" Obi-Wan asked.

"Fifty-five. Why?"

"You'd better get going on that wife and family, dontcha think?" Anakin asked.

"Why would you say that?"

"Well," Obi-Wan said. "If you had a kid right now, when that kid turned eighteen, you'd beâ€| umâ€|"

"Seventy-three," Evan supplied. Ira's eyes widened.

"Oh my goodness, I never thought of that."

"Well, you GOTTA think of stuff like that," Anakin said. "Look at Leo and Evan here. They've got kids. OK, Leo is no spring chicken either, but at least he's gotten started already. Youâ€| man, you don't even have a girlfriend, do you?"

"Noâ€| well, there's SabÃ©. She and I are getting on rather well." Obi-Wan snorted.

"She's the Queen's chief handmaiden and a Lady in her own right. Do you really think she'd give that up to marry an actor who's saddled with a moneypit of a theatre that barely stays afloat?" Obi-Wan asked. Ira shrugged.

"Plus," Anakin added, "The Supreme Chancellor has some kind of bizarre relationship going on with her, so you'd really better watch your step. The Chancellor is not a guy you want to cross. He might decide to get that precious little theatre of yours rezoned into a post office or bulldozed into a parking lot."

"Oh my," Ira said, turning pale. "I had no idea." He drained his beer and stood. "Well, it's been fun but I'd really better be getting home. You've given me some new things to think about."

"See ya. It's been a real slice," Anakin said.

"So, on to my problem," Leo said.

"Where to start?" Anakin said, rolling his eyes.

"Lucas says I can't fight. Can you imagine? He really thinks Roy Rob can't fight!"

"Roy Rob can fight," Obi-Wan said. "The problem is, Leo Nelson can't."

"Yeah," Anakin agreed. "Face it, buddy. You really suck."

"Well, you're training me!" Leo reminded him.

"See this?" Anakin asked, holding up his lightsaber. "This is a lightsaber, not a magic wand." He tossed it onto the table and took another long sip of beer.

"Look, even I can fight better than you," Evan told Leo. "Anakin's right, you suck."

"At least I'm not a sellout!" Leo retorted. "I seem to remember reading that you thought the holofilm industry is, and I quote, 'a load of bullocks'. Perhaps your seven figure paycheck changed your opinion for you!"

"That's a load of crap!" Evan said angrily. "I'm not a sellout! I only did this film because of my uncle!"

"He was in Force Wars," the others said in unison.

"That's right, it's a family tradition!" Evan yelled. Leo snorted.

"Sure it is," he agreed. "Sellout." Furious, Evan jumped to his feet, snatched Anakin's lightsaber off the table and ignited it, lunging for Leo's head.

"Shit!" Anakin yelled, coming to his feet and spilling beer everywhere. Obi-Wan had reflexively come to his feet and ignited HIS lightsaber, deflecting Evan's blow and saving Leo's life by mere millimeters. Evan seemed immobilized by shock. His blue blade remained locked with Obi-Wan's, and the two blades crackled and spat.

"Uh.. Evan? I don't think this is a fight you really want to have." Anakin said quietly. "You fight better than Leo, butâ€"

"But most elderly housewives fight better than Leo," Obi-Wan finished for him. Evan slowly looked around as though just realizing where he was. He deactivated Anakin's lightsaber and wordlessly handed it back to him. "I think it's time to call it a night," Obi-Wan said quietly.

"Have you made those changes I require?" PadmÃ© asked Lucas George. The director laughed.

"There's been a big change," he told her. "There's not going to be a holofilm at all."

"What?" Anakin asked.

"The project has been shelved until further notice."

"Why?" Obi-Wan asked. Lucas sighed.

"Our stuntman quit yesterday, for one thing."

"Yes, we heard about that." Palpatine said. "Can't you just replace him?"

"Sure. But then Natasha Fortman came to me this morning and said she wants out of her contract. Said she wants to spend some time just enjoying her life."

"Oh really?" PadmÃ© asked, smiling.

"Really. Then Ira McDonald came to me. He's not interested in being in this film anymore. His biological clock is going off and he's looking for a woman so he can have some kids, of all the damn things."

"Oh dear," Palpatine said. "How unexpected."

"Tell me about it," Lucas replied. "Then Leo came to me, said he'd almost been killed last night and he wants to take some time off to get closer to God."

"A worthy aim, to be sure," Obi-Wan murmured.

"Then Evan told me that me and my holofilm are a load of bullocks, he's a SERIOUS ACTOR and he wants nothing to do with me or the rest of the holofilm establishment, and he'd rather starve than sell out."

"Wow," Anakin said.

"So," Lucas finished, "I have no cast except for Jack Floyd, and I'm already a few million credits over budget. The studio decided to cut their losses and pull the plug on it."

"What a shame," PadmÃ© murmured.

"Yes, I feel terrible about this, Mr. George," Palpatine said.

"Me too," Anakin agreed.

"Well," Obi-Wan said. "This whole episode did have a lot of bizarre twists to it, AND an unexpected ending. You should be thrilled, Mr. George â€“ it would make a good holofilm!"

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